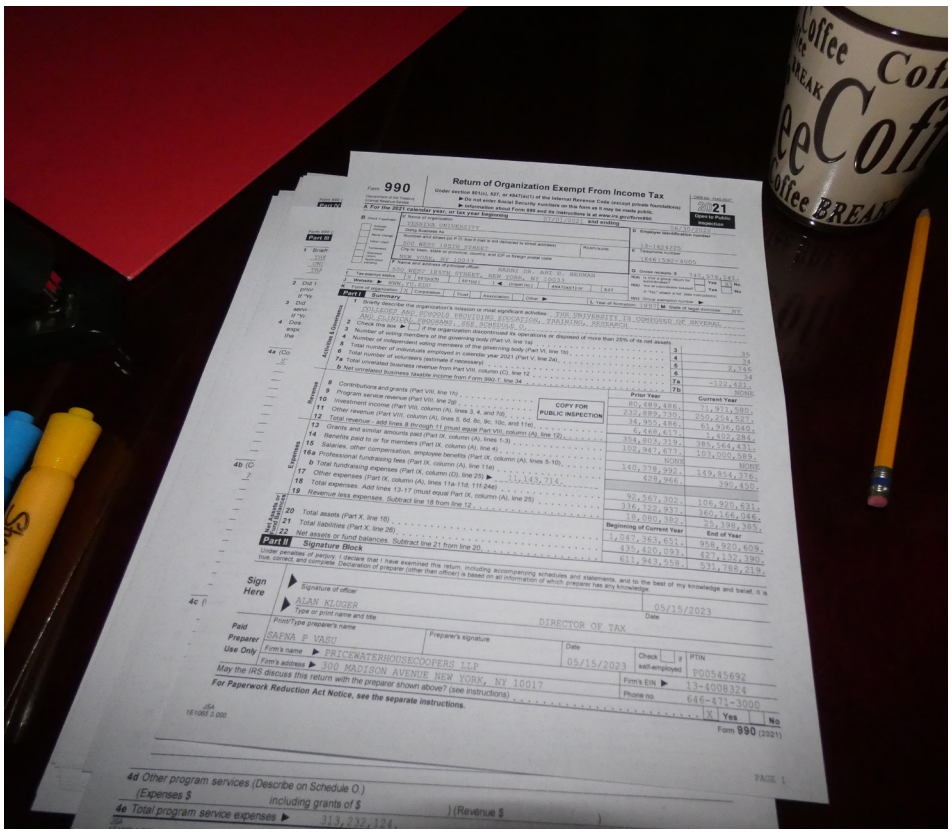
The Commentator

The Independent Student Newspaper of Yeshiva University

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YU's 2021 Form 990 Released; Reveals Salary of President Berman, University Finances



Yeshiva University's form 990 for the 2021 fiscal year was released this summer.

JONATHAN LEVIN / THE COMMENTATOR

By Sruli Friedman

Yeshiva University President Ari Berman received $805,962 in total compensation between July 2021 and August 2022, according to information obtained by The Commentator from the university's form 990 filings for fiscal year 2021 with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Form 990 is an IRS form legally required from tax-exempt organizations, which provides financial information available to the general public. The form is filed annually on May 15 and becomes publicly available soon after.

Berman's total compensation, made up of his base compensation of $638,226 in addition to nearly $170,000 of other benefits, increased about $114,000 from the previous fiscal year. His compensation previously decreased by $53,637 in the 2020 fiscal year, likely as part of the 20% pay cut Berman announced he was taking as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Berman resides in a 2-story home in Teaneck, New Jersey, purchased by the university for $1.8 million upfront in 2018. The house is currently valued by Zillow at over $2.1 million.

Vice President of Legal Affairs and General Counsel Andrew Lauer and Vice President of Business Affairs and Chief Financial Officer Jacob Harman remained, respectively, the second and third highest-earning university officials, with Lauer receiving total compensation of $662,230 and Harman being compensated $534,740.

Former President Richard Joel remains the ninth highest compensation of any university official, with a base salary of $228,338 and total compensation of $430,138.

For the second year in a row, YU's total revenue exceeded total costs, with the school spending $360 million and bringing in $385 million for a net revenue of $25 million — a $7 million increase from last year.

The university's sources of revenue included $250 million in tuition — a $30 million increase year over year — and $70 million of gifts, grants and contributions — a decrease of $10 million. Government grants rose $2 million, to a total of $10 million.

Individual expenses included $140 million in employee salaries and benefits, and $100 million in scholarships for 3,726 students. Spending on security reached $10 million. University expenditures on repairs and maintenance decreased by over $1 million,

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Robert Beren, Philanthropist and Former Chairman of YU's Board of Trustees, Dies at 97

By Jonathan Levin

Robert Beren, chairman emeritus of YU's board of trustees and a philanthropist who donated millions to Jewish causes, including to Yeshiva University, passed away Aug. 8. He was 97.

Beren was elected to YU's board of trustees in 1989, and served on the board, including as vice chairman in 1999 and chairman from 2000-2002, until shortly before his death last week. He passed away, surrounded by his family, in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida and was buried Aug. 10 at the Wichita Hebrew Cemetery in Wichita, Kansas.

Yeshiva University's Israel Henry Beren Campus in Midtown, the Robert M. Beren Department of History at Stern College for Women (SCW) and Yeshiva College (YC) and the Israel Henry Beren Floor at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law are all named in honor of his support of the university.

"It was important for Robert for Yeshiva University not only to be good, but to be world class," Yeshiva University President Ari Berman told The Commentator. "He had a vision for an educated Jewish citizenry who were cultured, articulate and well read; who would thrive in the workplace and become captains of industry; who would command respect from all who knew them and who would proudly bear their religion and identity as patriots and Zionists.

"He was so proud of our students," continued Berman, "who are not only deeply rooted in their tradition but also excel so extraordinarily in the commercial markets and in the marketplace of ideas. He especially enjoyed when our basketball team, the Macs, were number one in the country and thousands of fans tuned in across the world to experience us begin each game with the

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Robert M. Beren at the 2018 dedication of the Robert M. Beren Machanaim Hesder Yeshiva in Israel, courtesy of Ohr Torah Stone

OHR TORAH STONE

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From the Editor's Desk

Apathy, the Five Torot and Student Involvement on Campus: YU is Ours for the Taking

By Rivka Bennun and Jonathan Levin

When we first entered YU, neither of us entertained the thought that we would eventually become editors-in-chief of The Commentator. Coming to a school with no journalism major and lacking any prior experience, we were never obvious choices for this role.

It turns out that you don't need any prior experience in something to succeed in college. Thanks to many hours of hard work and mentoring from past Commentator editors, combined with actually taking the plunge to sign up and write, we began a journey that resulted in our articles making national headlines and creating change on campus. Eventually, we were honored to be selected as editors-in-chief of this nearly 90 year-old paper.

Therein lies the beauty of beginnings. To achieve success in college requires just two things: a willingness to try, and the conviction to succeed.

It requires no past experience or academic success. It doesn't matter how large your financial aid grant is. You just need to get involved. Excitement and passion for making campus a better place and making YU the best place it can be will get you far.

The small undergraduate student size of Yeshiva University — approximately 2000 students were on campus last spring — offers us many opportunities to get involved in YU's many student organizations and gives every student a stronger voice than they would have in larger schools. Not only is it fun, but one can make a difference while gaining valuable skills and experience in the process. However, despite myriad opportunities, the biggest issue facing student organizations on campus is apathy: It is hard to convince students to be active.

Take student government, for instance. By election day last May, only three of 19 elected positions on Wilf Campus were contested, and eight — including all Sy Syms School of Business positions and Yeshiva College Student Council president — lacked a name on the ballot and were write-ins only. Election data released on Beren Campus elections only includes winners, but many high-ranking positions, including Beren Campus Student Government president and executive vice president, and Torah Activities Committee president, went uncontested.

The running joke in student government and major student organizations on both campuses is that the same small circle of students do everything from running the Seforim Sale to student government.

Regardless of who you were in the past before coming to YU, you need only to take the first step, and your conviction will write your story for you, for the betterment of our entire campus community.

This apathy extends beyond Yeshiva University's programs as well. Upon one of us attending the annual Israel on Campus Coalition summit earlier this month, it was a surprise to discover that despite the presence of hundreds of students — both Jewish and non-Jewish — from over 100 universities across the country, there were no other current students from the "flagship Jewish university" there. Despite our status as arguably the most pro-Israel institution of higher education in the country, we almost went unrepresented at a major pro-Israel student gathering.

The question is why, especially considering that Yeshiva University itself encourages activism and involvement. YU has run trips to aid Ukrainian refugees, promoted *chessed* in Central America and has worked to help people affected by disasters in our very own city. There are multiple programs, including the Straus Scholars and the new Leadership Scholars, that aim to promote student involvement and debate on modern-day issues, both on and off campus. Our institution has also taken steps to improve interfaith relationships, inviting influential Muslim figures to campus, running joint conferences with Emirati universities in Dubai, offering Master's degrees in Jewish studies for Christian students at Revel, and even having our university president speak to 10,000 students at Brigham Young University.

The principles behind all these initiatives are grounded in Yeshiva University's values and play a prominent role in YU's outward expressions of its philosophy.

Contrary to popular belief, Yeshiva University's public displays of its five core Torah values, like those at the entrances of campus buildings, are not and were never about vocalizing how our values manifest internally — which is perhaps why they aren't taught in classes — but are instead meant to express their external manifestations to the world at large.

The university's expression of its values and the importance it assigns to engagement stands in stark contrast with the levels of apathy on campus, which is surprising. Sadly, we can't answer why this is the case, although there is no doubt that several competing factors have contributed to this situation.

Nevertheless, the very nature of the college experience makes this easily reversible. Opportunity on campus is available to everyone, regardless of one's past, background or hometown. It is not restricted to just a few active students. Indeed, it is incumbent upon those active students to help include and acclimate newcomers into the fold. Regardless of who you were in the past before coming to YU, you need only to take the first step, and your conviction will write your story for you, for the betterment of our entire campus community.

The Commentator

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The Commentator is the student newspaper of Yeshiva University.

For 89 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduate social, religious and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities.

The Commentator staff claims students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva.

We are united by our passion for living the ideals of Torah Umadda*, and a commitment to journalistic excellence.*

Read more at yucommentator.org



1 7up 7down returns!

After a year-long hiatus, this is definitely an up 😃.



2 Muss air conditioning

Temperatures on Amsterdam Ave fall to a 100-year low.



3 New Sephardi beit

Gives much-needed space to Sephardim and an awkward way to bring bins into Morg.



4 The A train 183rd & Overlook entrance reopens

Travel for ppl who miss the shuttle is about to get a Kefitzas Haderech-lite upgrade.



5 Furst & 245 scaffolding up; scaffolding on Muss comes down

There was a building behind there? (catch the trees growing on the building for bonus points)



6 Revel to hold in-person classes again

And there's a new master's program for Christian students too!



7 Coming back to campus!

It's nice to be back — even if the city smells like weed

7UP 7DOWN

By Commentator Staff

1 Affirmative Action Overturned

The 5th least diverse school in the country faces real challenges in increasing diversity



2 X

How can you re-X something?



3 Stomp Out the Stigma: spotted lanternflies to make a triumphant return this Fall

Brace for the second year of lanternfly-stomping outside Belfer. It's a mitzvah — look it up



4 Lawsuit silence: The quiet amidst the storm

It's been silent for too long. It's gotta be any day now



5 MTA fare increases

Caf prices don't leave us with 15 cents to spare



6 Orientation lasts for one week

My orientation was a canvas course and Zoom lecture



7 Elevator wait times

It's like getting stuck in the Lincoln Tunnel



To submit suggestions for future editions of 7up 7down, contact 7up7down@yucommentator.org

Letter to the Editor

What History Can Teach us About the Stern Talmud Controversy

By Menucha (Quint) Chwat

Reading the discussion about Talmud in Stern College — spanning all the way from the Rav's opening shiur in the Stern *beit midrash* to the current controversy — has brought a flood of memories and mixed emotions. Mildly amused that this event was being debated by two rabbis, I felt that I should bring the perspective of one who was there when it all started.

I remember when I first heard about the new *beit midrash* program at SCW, which allowed for the first Talmud classes for women. I immediately changed my plans and went on early admissions. The "advanced level" shiur was given by Rabbi Mordechai Willig. The first lists of sources to prepare were tantalizingly full, and I knew that this would be the opportunity for women to learn *Gemara* on a high level.

However, this vision was short-lived. Fewer and fewer women were really preparing the sources, and it showed. The level of the class drastically dropped, the lists of sources diminished and it was apparent from many frivolous questions that very few women wanted to put in the effort necessary to properly learn *Gemara*.

The second semester that year began with the shocking announcement that the "intermediate" and "advanced" shiurim would be merged into one class taught by Rabbi Baruch Lanner. That was in effect the end of the "new era in women's learning at YU." More than 40 years later, reading The Commentator, it seems as though history is repeating itself: an exciting new program followed by diminishing enrollment and its eventual termination by the administration.

This phenomenon is in accordance with what is explicitly stated in the Rambam (Talmud Torah 1:13), namely, that most women's minds are not attuned to being taught Torah. With this in mind, it is quite reasonable that the enrollment for Talmud classes at Stern has shrunk. Ideologically — if not economically — this should be seen as an ideal. Programs should be geared for the minority of women who can and will learn Talmud seriously, not use it as a source of frivolity, and this is exactly what the current state of Talmud enrollment reflects.

Do I regret my time in the Stern *beit midrash*? Not at all. For one brief and shining moment, I experienced the best that YU had to offer. It is because of those shiurim back then that I can experience the best that YU has to offer today. I can sit in my home on a relatively isolated settlement in the Judean Hills, thousands of miles away from Washington Heights and hear YUTorah *shiurim* on any tractate, chapter or page in the Talmud from a dazzling variety of *roshei yeshiva*. And for this, I am eternally grateful to Stern. More importantly, I have no doubt that my studies at Stern have made me a better Jewish woman, mother, grandmother and teacher.

But, that is not to say that Talmud is or should be for every woman at Stern. As the Rambam and history tell us, we should not expect this of everyone, and it might even

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New Beren Writing Center Receives $3 Million Donation from Eisenberg Family Foundation

By Mijal Gutierrez

Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women (SCW) received a $3 million donation to establish a new writing center beginning this fall. The donation, from the Eisenberg Family Foundation, was donated in memory of Lea and Leon Eisenberg, two longtime YU donors.

The new Lea and Leon Eisenberg Writing Center will utilize the funds to help monitor changes in writing caused by technology and AI, as well as continue to aid the development of students' writing skills, Dean of Undergraduate Faculty and Arts Karen Bacon told The Commentator.

Construction of a new facility to house the center began mid-June and will continue throughout the summer and early fall. According to Bacon, students will be able to enjoy the services of the new center sometime after the *Chagim*. Until the work's completion, students will continue to have access to writing center services on the 6th floor of 215 Lexington Ave.

Lea and Leon Eisenberg were munificent supporters of Jewish education and Yeshiva University. Mr. Eisenberg graduated from Yeshiva University in 1947, and Mrs. Eisenberg served as chair of the Stern College for Women Board of Overseers. Together, they made multiple donations to the university, including one to build the Lea and Leon Eisenberg Beit Midrash on Beren Campus.

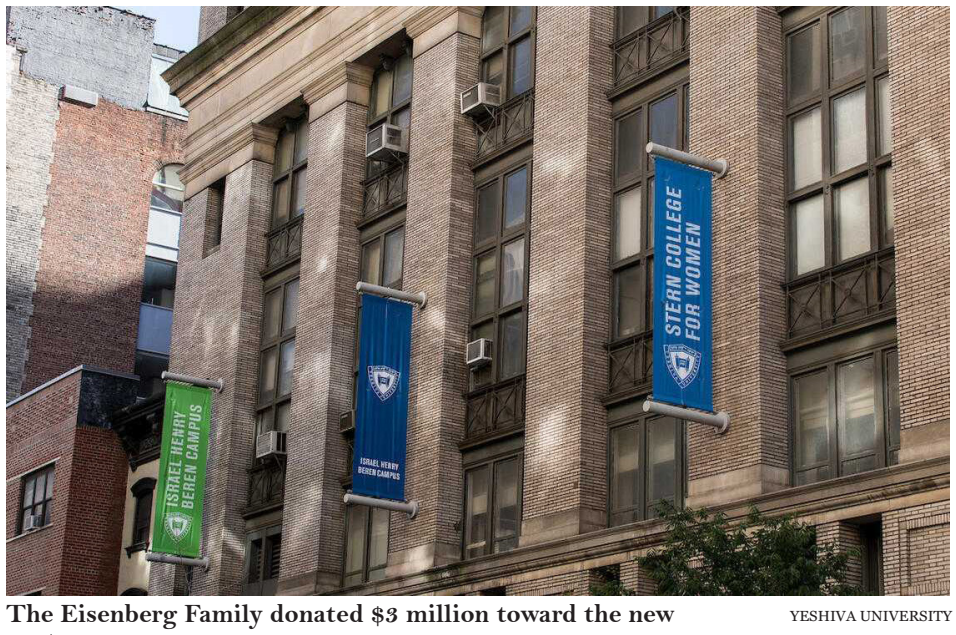
> *"Lea and Leon Eisenberg (A'H) were extraordinary human beings and exceptional supporters of YU and SCW in particular... As our women become more sophisticated writers, they will be carrying forward the Eisenberg legacy."*
>
> Dean Karen Bacon

The donation for the new writing center comes from Lea and Leon Eisenberg's children, Dr. Larry Eisenberg (YC '75), Richard Eisenberg (YC '77), and Reva Hirsch, directors of the Eisenberg Family Foundation.

"Lea and Leon Eisenberg (A'H) were extraordinary human beings and exceptional supporters of YU and SCW in particular," Bacon told The Commentator. "They generously gave of their time and their advice in addition to their financial gifts.

"This project, sponsored by their children to honor their memory, is so very fitting. Both Lea and Leon spoke and wrote with grace, with the language and the tone of those educated formally in Europe before the War and who continued to be lifelong learners. As our women become more sophisticated writers, they will be carrying forward the Eisenberg legacy."

The money was donated as part of "Rise Up: The Campaign for 613," YU's campaign to raise $613 million to make new investments in faculty, facilities and scholarships.



The Eisenberg Family donated $3 million toward the new center YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

New, More Spacious Sephardic Beit Midrash Nearly Completed

By Yosef Bluth

Yeshiva University has nearly completed construction of a new Sephardic *Beit Midrash* built over the summer. The new *Beit Midrash* will be located in the space taken up by the old Morg Lounge on the ground floor of Wilf Campus' Morgenstern Residence Hall, near its old, smaller location.

The *Beit Midrash's* relocation is due to spacial issues, university spokesperson Hanan Eisenman told The Commentator in a statement later published on YUNews, with the current location unable to accommodate many students. The administration hopes that the new space will "create a more welcoming and expansive environment" for the growing Sephardic student body. Construction is expected to be completed sometime in the fall semester.

"Sephardic programs at YU are on the rise and this new Sephardic *Beit Midrash* will greatly enhance our efforts," Sephardic Mashgiach Rabbi Dan Cohen, said in a statement shared by The Commentator and YUNews. "We are very excited to move into this new space and offer a highly meaningful experience to our students."



The ground floor of Morgenstern Residence Hall is receiving a redesign with a new Sephardic Beit Midrash and lounge area. THE COMMENTATOR

> *"We are ecstatic about the new beit midrash as this will surely enhance our events given the growing Sephardic population at YU. We have the utmost hakarat hatov to YU as this step not only makes us feel welcomed but also appreciated for our efforts. We look forward to this coming year!"*
>
> The YU Sephardi Club

The Morgenstern Hall student lounge, which will be moved into the area currently occupied by the *Beit Midrash*, will also be receiving an upgrade. The space will be expanded into what is currently the lobby and include new furniture with stool seating facing out the front windows onto Amsterdam Avenue. These upgrades are designed to create "a unique ambiance" in the lounge to better serve students, Eisenman told The Commentator, and were made with input from students as well as resident advisors.

Eisenman also expressed hope that although the new *Beit Midrash* was designed with Sephardic students in mind, all students would be able to benefit from the change.

"Sephardic Rabbinic leadership and student leaders have been involved and consulted at each step of this project. They are excited to share the new space with their fellow Sephardim, as well as the many others, especially the residents of Morgenstern Hall. All students on campus, Sephardic or Ashkenazi, are welcome and encouraged to use the new space to learn Torah, Daven and grow spiritually."

Sephardic students are also excited for the opening of the new *Beit Midrash*.

"We are ecstatic about the new *beit midrash* as this will surely enhance our events given the growing Sephardic population at YU," the YU Sephardic Club told The Commentator. "We have the utmost hakarat hatov to YU as this step not only makes us feel welcomed but also appreciated for our efforts. We look forward to this coming year!"

FORM 990
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to a total of about $2.5 million.

YU's total assets and net assets both declined from the previous fiscal year, with total assets slipping below the billion dollar mark to $958 million. Although total liabilities also fell $7 million, net assets fell by about $80 million to a total of $531 million. This seems to be driven in part by a decline in the value of YU's investments in securities. The university sold $416 million worth of securities in the past year for a profit of $60 million, amounts more than doubled from 2020. The value of the total securities owned by the university declined by $93 million.

A redacted version of form 990's schedule B, which details the names and addresses of donors of more than $5,000, was made available to The Commentator, listing the value of eight donations, the highest of which was $15 million. Donors' names and addresses were omitted. Last year, the full schedule B was removed from the public version of the form.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR
Continued from Page 3

be beneficial to discourage it in some cases.

Regardless of what the future holds for Stern Talmud studies, as I sit in my house in the Judean hills, the very least I can do is reflect upon the positive experiences I had at Stern and give thanks that my lot is among those who sit in the "virtual" *beit hamidrash*.

Menucha (Quint) Chwat graduated from SCW in 1981.

Sy Syms Core Curriculum Receives Update With New Three Semester Required Sequence

By Ruben Prawer

Yeshiva University's Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB) introduced the "Three Semester Required Sequence" (TSRS) last semester, reorganizing its core curriculum to better suit students' academic needs.

Requiring the completion of specific business core and quantitative course requirements during a student's first three semesters on campus, TSRS will better prepare students for intermediate and advanced-level courses, Assistant SSSB Dean Debra Pine told The Commentator. Basic and intermediate courses that students will be required to take include Accounting Principles, Business Communication and Statistics for Business, among others.

The initiative, spearheaded by Pine and SSSB Dean Noam Wasserman, was inspired by the block schedule — a course scheduling system meant to maximize student learning — created for incoming students in the fall 2020 semester during the COVID-19 pandemic. Positive student feedback inspired the administration to rethink the registration and course selection process, Pine said. Additionally, academic advisors and department chairs noticed that many students delayed taking certain requirements, especially quantitative courses, a phenomenon which they believed left students underdeveloped in the skills necessary for upper level coursework.

"We are confident the required sequence will better prepare our students for upper-level business courses, facilitate major selection, ease the road to graduation and relieve the stress of first semester registration."

Debra Pine, SSSB assistant dean

Pine also told The Commentator that faculty "observed that some students decided to change majors relatively late because they ended up unexpectedly liking a course they had avoided," which required some students to add a semester to complete their preferred majors. "The new system ensures that students are introduced to each subject area before they select a major," continued Pine.

Although quantitative and business core courses will serve as prerequisites for all upper-level courses, Pine suggested that accommodations may be made for some current students.

"While current students will be encouraged to complete their core requirements as soon as possible, they will be permitted in certain cases to begin taking their intermediate and advanced courses as they complete their core classes." Pine informed The Commentator. "They should speak with their Academic Advisors if they have any questions about this."

Pine also assured The Commentator that despite the uniformly required sequence, there will be room to tailor to individual students' needs. This includes adapting the sequence for students with advanced placement, transfer credits or post-*Pesach* courses. Honors students and non-native English speakers' first semester courses will also reflect their academic needs.

"We are confident the required sequence will better prepare our students for upper-level business courses, facilitate major selection, ease the road to graduation and relieve the stress of first semester registration," Pine said.



Sy Syms updated their curriculum with a required sequence of core classes THE COMMENTATOR

Student Court Affirms Election of Sy Syms Student Council President, Overturning Precedent

By Sruli Friedman

This article was originally published June 20, 2023.

The Wilf Campus Student Supreme Court affirmed the election of Andrew Jacobson (SSSB '24) as Sy Syms School of Business Student Council (SSSC) president in an unanimous decision last month, rejecting a claim that the candidate who received the most votes, named in the opinion as John Doe, was illegitimately disqualified.

The suit, filed by Andrew Warren (SSSB '24), alleged that the Wilf Campus Canvassing Committee, the student organization tasked with overseeing elections, had disqualified Doe based on a faulty reading of a previous court decision. Warren argued that an earlier decision, Akiva Poppers v. Yeshiva University Canvassing Committee, allowed credits from summer classes to count towards the grade standing constitutionally required for certain student government positions.

In the 2020 Poppers decision, the court ruled that Akiva Poppers (SSSB '22), who had edged out his opponent for the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) presidency by one vote, could count "in progress" summer classes towards his constitutionally recognized grade standing.

The Canvassing Committee argued that unlike in Poppers, when graduation — and the transfer of student government positions — was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the fact Doe's summer courses had not formally begun meant the credits would not meet Poppers' criteria of "in progress." The Committee also questioned the overall validity of Poppers, arguing that the ruling contradicts the Wilf Campus Student Constitution, which provides that class standing for purposes of holding office be "determined by the Office of the Registrar."

Doe himself was not involved in arguing the case, and his name was redacted from the court's opinion due to personal requests and legal issues related to the disclosure of information related to his class standing, a representative of the court told The Commentator.

"We are hopefully going to have a meeting with all stakeholders, including OSL, to determine how to best follow the rules while maintaining fair elections, including the possibility of amending the constitution to clarify or change the rules."

YSU President Zakkai Notkin (YC '24)

In its opinion, the court accepted the Canvassing Committee's arguments that the precedent set by Poppers did not apply to the current case, and that the constitutional definition of the class standing required to hold office is indeed identical to the registrar's definition, overturning the court's standard in Poppers that allowed any credits "in progress" to count towards a student's constitutional class standing.

The court acknowledged that since the registrar only counts completed credits with grades submitted by professors toward class standing, the decision means that any student who receives an insufficient number of graded credits by graduation day to meet a position's class standing requirement would be liable to disqualification by the Canvassing Committee, even after receiving a plurality of student votes.

Although the court was unanimous in overturning Poppers — the second known precedent ever overturned in the court's history — Justice Jacob Karp (YC '23) wrote a partial dissent, criticizing the court's new standard that would likely disqualify many candidates, and proposing that courses with coursework completed be counted toward class standing, even before any final grade is given.

Warren, in a statement to The Commentator, also pointed out problems about the enforcement of the majority opinion.

"I see nothing wrong with the court following the strict wording of the constitution," said Warren. "But I suspect the canvassing committee of ignoring the verdict, as it's unlikely not a single election winner was disqualified thanks to a late grade. Since credits are private knowledge and the canvassing committee dissolves on graduation day, there's no way of holding anyone accountable and enforcing this rule."

Mr. Poppers himself, who had represented Warren in oral arguments, expressed dissatisfaction with the decision.

"The Student Court has become a kangaroo court," Poppers told The Commentator. "The ruling is illogical, and suggests that elections have been incorrectly conducted for as long as the Constitution has existed ... The ruling implies that students who are graduating vote for next year's senior representative and that most students are ineligible to serve as a student council president at any point in their time at YU ... By overturning precedent two years in a row, the door has been opened for existing precedent to be overturned on a yearly basis, depending on the wishes of the current student government. This is a sham."

While the court's opinion did acknowledge difficulties that could arise in the implementation of the new standard, the majority explained that it was constrained in its decision by the "only reasonable reading" of the Constitution.

"Even as there are potential logistical issues with the ramifications of this opinion," the opinion, delivered by Justice Elishama Marmon (YC '24), stated "at least one thing remains clear: it is outside of the purview of this Court to decide what it thinks laws ought to be. Such a responsibility is vested with the Amendments Committee, the General Assembly, and the student body. The Court thinks it advisable for these groups to take action to rectify the situation, whether by providing a more workable definition of class standing than the Registrar's or through other methods they deem appropriate." (Marmon is managing editor of The Commentator. He was not involved in the reporting or editing of this article.)

Members of the Canvassing Committee told The Commentator that they felt vindicated by the court's ruling.

"The Canvassing Committee is very happy that justice prevailed and that the court confirmed our decision to name Andrew Jacobson the next Sy Syms President," said 2022–'23 Canvassing Committee Chairman Daniel Ganopolsky (YC '24).

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Former White House Speechwriter Speaks to Students about Writing and Leadership

By Rina Shamilov

This article was originally published May 18, 2023.

Former White House speechwriter Sarah Hurwitz, who wrote speeches for former President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, spoke to students on both the Beren and Wilf Campuses May 3.

The discussions were moderated by Erica Brown, YU's vice provost of values and leadership and director of the Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership, which hosted the events.

While downtown, Hurwitz met with Beren students and described the anxiety she felt while in law school, and how she overcame imposter syndrome over time.

On the Wilf campus, she provided students and faculty with an overview of her experiences in the legal, political and writing fields, offering career advice and writing and editing tips, emphasizing the importance of fact checking and cohesion.

> *"It has been a total joy to be here today. Students here are so smart, thoughtful and insightful, asking such great questions and providing thought-provoking comments. It's been a total pleasure."*
>
> Sarah Hurwitz

Hurwitz began her career in politics as an undergraduate student in Harvard, and landed an internship at the White House. After early experiences with speech writing, she felt her talents lay elsewhere, but when her law firm let her take on a pro-bono speech writing project several years after finishing law school, she realized it was something she excelled at and enjoyed.

Before coming to the White House, Hurwitz first worked as chief speechwriter on then-Sen. Clinton's unsuccessful 2008 primary campaign for the presidency. She became a member of Democratic Presidential Nominee Barack Obama's staff two days after Clinton conceded.

Working at the White House, while fulfilling, was no easy task, Hurwitz said, describing the initial difficulties around channeling the Obamas' voices. However, she was able to overcome that hurdle after spending several hours around them, eventually reaching the point where she felt she could hear their voices in her head.

"I always had her voice inside my head," she admitted of Michelle Obama.

After years of working with the Obamas, it took a while for Hurwitz to reacclimate to her own voice.

This is partly what sparked Hurwitz to write her own book, "Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life—in Judaism," which describes her process of rediscovering Judaism in adulthood.

As she discovered Judaism and her passions for it, a friend of hers encouraged her to write a book about what she found.

"That's when I decided I wanted to use my own voice," she told students. "I felt sick of not having a voice. I felt like maybe I had something I wanted to say."

Hurwitz noted the vast differences between speech and other forms of writing, something that affected her transition to writing her book. It was difficult at first, but something she was eventually able to overcome by compiling her findings in a cohesive and structured manner.

"There's writing to be spoken and writing to be read," said Hurwitz. The former allows for run-on sentences and un-grammatical structures, but the latter requires a rigid organization.

However, the transition was made easier by knowing that "the responsibility is less severe," since when writing her book, she didn't need to worry about how the words she chose might affect the entire nation.

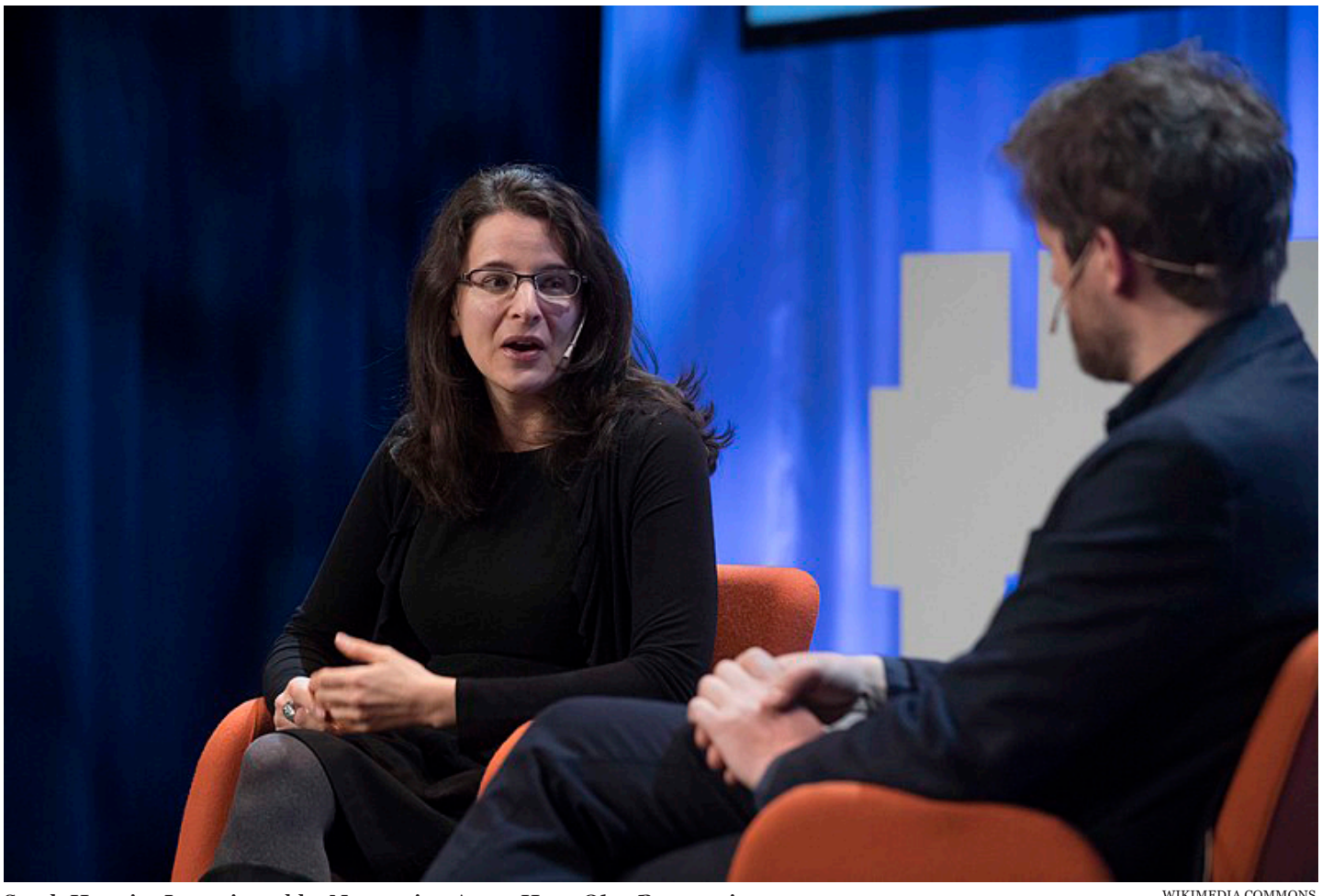
Hurwitz also gave numerous writing tips to students, and took additional writing-related questions from the audience.

Students told The Commentator that they found the event meaningful and helpful.

"As someone who struggles with writing," said Yitzhak Graff (YC '24), "I found it comforting to learn that writers at the highest professional levels regularly encounter difficulty in drafting their pieces."

Hurwitz was similarly impressed by YU students.

"It has been a total joy to be here today," she told The Commentator shortly after the event. "Students here are so smart, thoughtful, and insightful, asking such great questions and providing thought-provoking comments. It's been a total pleasure."



Sarah Hurwitz Interviewed by Norwegian Actor Hans Olav Brenner in 2017 WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

ROBERT BEREN
Continued from Front Page

singing of both the star-spangled banner and Hatikvah."

Born in Marietta, Ohio in 1925, Beren enlisted in the U.S. military during the Second World War while in freshman year at Harvard, serving in the European Theater in the U.S. Third Army. After completing military service, Beren graduated Harvard in 1947 and received a Master's in Business Administration from Harvard Business School in 1950.

Beren later joined his family's oil and gas business in Marietta, founded by his uncle, Israel Henry Beren — whom Beren Campus and the Israel Henry Beren Floor at Cardozo is named for — before helping found Berexco, a large Wichita-based oil company, in the 1960s.

Robert Beren received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from the university in 1987, two years before being elected to YU's board of trustees. Yeshiva University's midtown campus was named in his uncle's honor in 2003, as well as the 9th floor of the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law's Brookdale Center, which was named in 2005.

> *"[Robert Beren] especially enjoyed when our basketball team, the Macs, were number one in the country and thousands of fans tuned in across the world to experience us begin each game with the singing of both the star-spangled banner and Hatikvah."*
>
> Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, president of Yeshiva University

Robert Beren also supported many other Jewish and secular organizations, including Harvard, The Robert M. Beren Academy in Houston, Beth Medrash Govoha, Ohr Torah Stone, Camp Ramah, Ner Yisroel Rabbinical College, Tikvah, The University of Kansas, The Jerusalem Institute of Technology and the Robert M. Beren Machanaim Yeshiva in Migdal Oz.

He was also active in many other national and local Jewish organizations, including as president of Ahavath Achim Hebrew Congregation in Wichita, trustee of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, chairman of the Wichita United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and was on the Board of Governors of Hillel International.

"Robert believed in projecting Jewish excellence and strength," said Berman. "After his years in the US army during the war, he came to the realization that in response to the powerlessness of European Jewry, we have a responsibility to do our best to never put ourselves in that position again by building an empowered Jewish community in the United States and supporting a strong state of Israel."

Beren was also a supporter of Republican causes, and as president of the Wichita school board in the early 1970's, he worked to desegregate the local school system.

Berman and Ira Mitzner, chairman of YU's board of trustees, placed an obituary in Robert Beren's legacy in the New York Times Aug. 10.

"With clarity of vision and purpose, Robert was an impactful leader for YU who invested wisely in the next generation through education and excellence," Berman told The Commentator.

Robert Beren is survived by his sister, his four children, and multiple grandchildren.

Beren Spring 2023 Election Results Released

By Rina Shamilov

This article was originally published May 14, 2023

The Beren Campus Election Committee released the Beren Campus Student Government (BCSG) spring 2023 election results May 5.

The elections, the first under the new Beren constitution and bylaws, were held May 4. Ballots were sent to students at 7 a.m. and remained open until 9 p.m.

The new constitution both removed and created several new positions in student government, including four representatives from Stern College for Women (SCW) and Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB), representatives for international and Mechina students and two General Judaics Representatives.

The initial results for International Representative were tied, with Linda Zakay (SCW '26) winning the May 10 special election. There will also be a special election for the Katz Representative in the fall following an empty ballot.

Unlike on Wilf, the Beren Election Committee is not constitutionally bound to release vote totals or turnout numbers for elections.

The following are the results:

BCSG President:
Avygayl Zucker

BCSG Executive Vice President:
Rikki Kolodny

VP of Academic Affairs:
Rivka Krause

VP of Programming:
Diana Gindi

VP of Student Organizations:
Eden Lippe

President of TAC:
Gaby Rahmanfar

Judaics Representatives:
Shalhevet Cohen and Nancy Alexander

Mechina Representative:
Sara Lesczynski

SCW Representatives:
Amanda Poupko and Flora Shemtob

Syms Representatives:
Mila Krugman and Hadaya Fried

International Representative:
Linda Zakay

Katz Representative:
To be elected in the fall

Wilf Spring 2023 Election Results Announced After Delay

By Sruli Friedman and Jonathan Levin

This article was originally published May 9, 2023.

The Wilf Campus Canvassing Committee released Spring 2023 Wilf Campus student government election results Sunday.

Thursday's election results were originally set to be released shortly after the election ended at midnight, but were delayed due to the time needed to count over 2,500 write-in ballots.

Large numbers of write-in ballots were cast in the election due to few students declaring candidacy within the April 25 official deadline, prompting students to run for open positions, including all Sy Syms School of Business Student Council (SSSBSC) positions and Yeshiva College Student Council (YCSC) president.

Some ballots were also cast for campaigns of frivolous nature, which encouraged students to vote for a single student for all positions — who wasn't disqualified given that the campaign wasn't being run by said student, and for the fictional characters Mr. Krabs and Plankton.

None of these campaigns garnered enough votes to cross the twenty-vote threshold required to win a position as a write-in candidate.

Of the 19 races in the election, only three were contested on the ballot, with eight having only one candidate on the ballot and the other eight being run by candidates in write-in campaigns.

Ballots were sent to students at 7:00 a.m., and elections were scheduled to end at 11:00 p.m.

However, due to an error in uploading student information, which sent ballots to students and alumni not eligible to vote, a second set of ballots was sent to students at 10:16 a.m., remaining open until midnight. Students who voted earlier had their ballots disqualified, and were required to vote again.

796 of 1143 students, or just under 70% of the Wilf Campus student body, participated in the election. Three races were inconclusive, and elections to fill those positions will be held in the fall.

Candidates

The following is a breakdown of the election results with vote totals and percentage of votes per candidate:

YSU President:
Zachary "Zakkai" Notkin - 415 (74.37%)

YSU VP of Clubs:
Alexander Siegman - 417 (79.13%)

YSU VP of Class Affairs:
Yehuda Mazin - 353 (63.95%)

YSU Senior Representative:
Write-in - 123 (100%)
Inconclusive as no candidate received the minimum twenty votes

YSU Junior Representative:
Sam Weinberg - 87 (36.10%)
Zanvy Lesnoy - 70 (29.05%)
Dylan Broder - 46 (19.09%)
Shneur Levy - 34 (14.11%)

YSU Katz Representative:
Write-in - 12 (100%)
Inconclusive as no candidate received the minimum twenty votes

YCSC President:
Write-in - 279 (100%)
Breakdown:
Shlomo Schwartz - 103 (36.91%)
Elishama Marmon - 76 (27.24%)
Yitzhak Graff - 25 (8.97%)
Other Write-ins - 75 (26.88%)

YCSC Vice-President :
Adin Blumofe - 201 (74.17%)

YCSC Treasurer:
Judah Berman - 243 (86.79%)

SYMSSC President:
Write-in - 301 (100%)
Breakdown:
Andrew Jacobson - 110 (36.54%)
Other Write-ins - 191 (63.46%)

SYMSSC Vice-President:
Write-in - 223 (100%)
Breakdown:
Charles Kemp - 122 (54.71%)
Other Write-ins - 101 (45.29%)

SYMSSC Treasurer:
Write-in - 230 (100%)
Breakdown:
David Benzaquen - 114 (49.57%)
Seth Coronel - 29 (12.60%)
Other Write-ins - 87 (37.83%)

SOY President:
David Kohanchi - 523 (87.02%)

SOY Vice-President:
Noam Mayerfeld - 494 (88.69%)

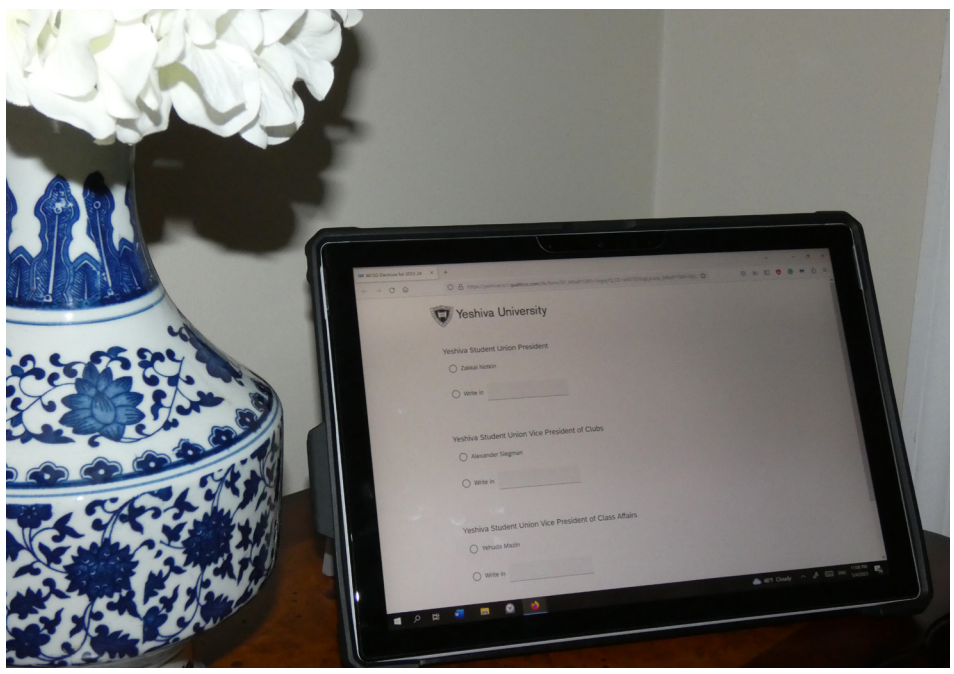
SOY Vice-President of Chessed:
Avraham Frohlich - 272 (48.42%)
Jacob Katz - 244 (42.96%)

SOY MYP Representative:
Write-in - 262 (100%)
Breakdown:
Nerya Miller - 82 (31.30%)
Yosef Feld - 25 (9.54%)
Other Write-ins - 155 (59.16%)

SOY SBMP Representative:
Daniel Jaffe - 113 (71.97%)

SOY IBC Representative:
Moshe Epstein - 47 (47.96%)
Joey Strobel - 26 (26.53%)
Yosef Bluth - 23 (23.47%)

SOY JSS Representative:
Write-in - 40 (100%)
Inconclusive as no candidate received the minimum twenty votes



Wilf Spring Election Results were released this May. JONATHAN LEVIN / THE COMMENTATOR

STUDENT COURT
Continued from Page 5

"Mr. Warren and Mr. Poppers' claims were absurd and unconstitutional. We are delighted that the court struck down the 2020 Poppers case as completely incompatible with reality. I'd like to thank my colleague, President Baruch Lerman, who played a vital role in ensuring justice was served on behalf of the whole Wilf student body."

Incoming YSU President Zakkai Notkin (YC '24), in a statement to The Commentator, expressed the Wilf Student Government's willingness to deal with potential challenges that may arise in future elections in a constitutional manner.

"Due to the way credits work, I don't think the fall election will be affected," Notkin explained. "For the spring election, we are hopefully going to have a meeting with all stakeholders, including OSL, to determine how to best follow the rules while maintaining fair elections, including the possibility of amending the constitution to clarify or change the rules."

Immediately following the opinion's release on May 19, Warren submitted a petition to challenge the court's ruling on grounds that were not publicly disclosed. The court unanimously upheld its ruling.

Jonathan Levin contributed to this story.

Season Finale: Professor Rachel Mesch's Last Year at YU

By Rafael Saperstein

Over the past 16 years at Yeshiva College, Professor Rachel Mesch has shaped the character of the English department. An expert in 19th century French literature and a scholar in gender studies, she taught classes such as "Parisian Views" and "France and its Others" which were staples of YU's English class offerings. These classes, in addition to her media studies classes and French language classes that she taught at the beginning of her stint at YU, became many students' favorites, and greatly impacted students.

One aspect of YU that she appreciated is the intellectual community that can be cultivated through Torah U'Madda, where students come into secular classes ready to learn and analyze with the dedication that they have towards their religious studies.

This past year, however, was Mesch's last teaching at YU, as she accepted a position at the Romance Languages Department in Boston University. There, she will teach classes in French to Ph.D students, utilizing her scholarship in gender studies, and will conduct research on 19th century France. Her departure closes the curtain on the general studies classes core that she had been teaching to YU students and allows her to teach more specialized classes.

Mesch, who earned her Masters in French literature and language from Columbia University and her doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania, was initially brought on at YU to teach French classes and build a language, literature and cultures department in 2007. This led to her going on trips to France with students and teaching classes exclusively in French. However, when budget cuts led the languages department to drop its Arabic, Yiddish, Spanish and French offerings, she transitioned to the English department. Her passions for teaching literature and ideas led her to also teach many of the freshman honors seminars and literature courses on both the Wilf and Beren campuses.

Reflecting on her move to Boston University to The Commentator, Mesch expressed excitement about working with graduate students beginning to pursue scholarship in her area of expertise, but stated that she will miss teaching on the undergraduate level at YU. One aspect of YU that she appreciated is the intellectual community that can be cultivated through Torah U'Madda, where students come into secular classes ready to learn and analyze with the dedication that they have towards their religious studies.

When questioned about her parting wishes to the YU community, Mesch told The Commentator how much she appreciated the passion of the secular studies faculty, and wanted to inform students that every professor at YU has an immense passion towards education and connecting with students in the classroom. She also encouraged students to enroll in many of the great classes in the English department that are available for students.



Professor Rachel Mesch taught at YU for 16 years. RACHEL MESCH

A Dorm? A Demolition? The Saga of 2461 Amsterdam Avenue

By Yitzhak Graff

As the academic year begins and we students return, we are greeted by branding in the forms of banners, flags and posters covering the walls of the YU campuses. An attentive student on the Wilf Campus could notice that the banners covering the fence around parking lot E extend to the fence surrounding the neighboring property, 2461 Amsterdam Avenue. Peeking behind the banner, between the slats of the fence, they would see a pile of rubble covering the vacant lot. A review of Google street view images reveals that as recently as 2021, a six story apartment building once stood there.

Yeshiva University's involvement with 2461 Amsterdam Avenue dates back to 1984. On September 4, 1984, a Great Neck based real estate developer named Richard Parkoff purchased the apartment building that once stood there. The very next day, Parkoff and YU signed an agreement over this property. Under this agreement, YU would have the right of first refusal to lease or purchase the property. This agreement was extended in 1991 to allow YU take over Parkoff's mortgage if he would default, though he never did.

In 2001, YU received a $60 million DASNY bond to fund several projects of acquiring and renovating several properties on the school's campuses. 2461 Amsterdam Avenue was one of the properties listed for purchase. The Commentator noticed this at the time and optimistically declared that the Washington Heights campus would be getting a new dorm in the near future, though they were not able to get confirmation of this from anyone in the administration.

The most significant consequence of the building's neglect came on August 7, 2017 when the building suffered a structural failure.

Though YU had the funds to purchase the building in 2001, the transaction did not take place until six years later. On January 22, 2007, the *2461 Amsterdam Avenue I LLC*, a corporation owned by YU, purchased the property at 2461 Amsterdam Avenue for $3.2 million. Within the next few years YU vacated the 6-story building. The exact timeline is not completely clear. The last signs of definite habitation of the building are from 2005, when the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) filed its last violation on the property that indicated a tenant was living in the building. The HPD profile of the building records that the first floor windows and basement door to the building were sealed in 2009 and the Google street view from 2011 shows that the entrance to the building was boarded up. Without any tenants, the University appears to have forgone maintenance. In 2012, a Department of Buildings (DOB) inspector fined YU $1000 for having a decaying cornice on the building, which could present a hazard to people walking by. In 2014, another inspector fined YU $500 for pieces of the façade that were pulling away from the building.

The most significant consequence of the building's neglect came on August 7, 2017 when the building suffered a structural failure. The roof partially collapsed bringing pieces of the top three stories down with it. The debris settled on the third floor.

Someone nearby must have heard what was going on and called the Fire department who issued an immediate vacate order and notified the DOB emergency response team. They arrived an hour later and inspected the damage, fining YU $1000 and ordering it to fix the building and make it code compliant.

In November and December 2017, the DOB issued YU two more fines, $800 each for failing to make the building code compliant. YU filed for a permit to demolish the building in January 2018, though the demolition was only cleared to commence in 2020.

In 2020, the building was ranked as having the second most open HPD violations of any building in Manhattan. The vast majority of the violations dated back to when the building was occupied with tenants before YU owned the building. Since none of the violations had been remedied, they remained open. All the violations were cleared when the building was demolished.

Looking forward, it's not known what YU will do with this vacant property beyond using its fence as a place to hang YU branded banners. In a press release from 2015, former President Richard Joel announced plans to work with NGKF Capital Markets (since rebranded to Newmark) to redevelop YU's properties around Parking Lot E, including 2461 Amsterdam Avenue. Time has yet to show any development from this arrangement.

Though we students experience YU as the school that we attend, the flagship Modern Orthodox institution is also a landlord for several properties in Washington Heights. The school's management of this particular property at 2461 Amsterdam Avenue is perplexing. Not only is it a loss of housing stock in the neighborhood, it is likely a financial loss for the university. The property seems to have been bought with borrowed DASNY money that continues to accrue interest as it gets carried over into larger bonds. The deterioration and subsequent demolition of the building have certainly caused the value of the property to drop significantly. Without any concrete plans to rehabilitate the property, the $3.2 million dollars spent on its purchase will continue to accrue interest without producing any income to offset it.

A bibliography of sources can be found here: https://lazymasmid.blogspot.com/2023/07/bibliography-for-2461-amsterdam-ave.html



2461 Amsterdam now ELISHAMA MARMON

A Legal Overview of the YU Pride Alliance Case

By Elishama Marmon

Yeshiva University is currently embroiled in a lawsuit regarding its decision not to recognize the Pride Alliance as an official club. Many people are likely unfamiliar with the facts of the case and the legal theories put forward by both sides. In this article, I intend to clarify the actual legal issues of the case.

Over the last decade, there were several attempts, under different names, to create an LGBTQ club in YU's undergraduate schools, all of which were rejected by the institution. YU claimed that such a club would be antithetical to its Torah values. Eventually, in 2021, after several years of club rejections, a group called the YU Pride Alliance, whose mission is to support LGBTQ students in YU, sued YU, alleging that YU's rejection of its club violated the New York City Human Rights Law (NYCHRL), which prohibits entities providing services to the public from discriminating against people on the basis of various protected classes including sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Pride Alliance alleges that since YU, in order to receive government funding, rechartered itself as a non-sectarian educational institution in 1967 — as opposed to a religious institution, which could be given First Amendment exemptions from certain regulations including NYCHRL — it is covered under NYCHRL as a public accommodation, and should therefore be required to recognize the Alliance. YU also made a statement to that effect in 1995 that it has since reversed. Additionally, YU's graduate schools have LGBTQ clubs, but YU has stated that the graduate schools are different, as the undergraduate schools are designed to be religious environments.

Despite YU's defense, which was largely based on the claim that YU is a fundamentally religious organization, a New York trial court judge ruled in favor of the Pride Alliance last June and ordered YU to recognize the club immediately.

This issue is an extremely complex one, but when we in YU discuss and analyze this case, a full and proper understanding of the actual facts and arguments present is certainly necessary.

YU immediately appealed to a higher New York court both challenging the outcome of the case, claiming that they should have won, and requesting a stay on the order, which would allow YU to not allow the club until the appeals process finishes. The main appeal made its way through the court slowly until the ruling was eventually upheld in December 2022 (though YU again appealed, this time to the highest court in NY). The request for a stay was rejected almost immediately, prompting YU to appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) to lift that injunction for the duration of the trial.

The next step of the case was YU's appeal to SCOTUS. Within a few weeks, on Sept. 14, YU lost its appeal on procedural grounds, with a 5–4 majority saying that YU had to go through the rest of the New York Court system before appealing to SCOTUS. This loss, which would have required immediate recognition of the Pride Alliance, prompted YU to freeze all undergraduate clubs. After about a month, the Pride Alliance and YU agreed to a stay in court, allowing YU to not approve the club until after the appeals process in the case was finished, and clubs were restored.

Currently, the case has slowed down since some of the plaintiffs are now looking for payment for damages in a separate case that is bogged down in discovery, the lawsuit phase where both sides try to find information and documents from the other. The main case cannot progress until the damages case is resolved. Eventually, though, the case will move forward.

In SCOTUS, for the first time, we can see hints of where the case will end up. To understand how the case will likely turn out, we need to understand the legal questions addressed by SCOTUS and the content of the dissenting opinion in the case, written by Justice Samuel Alito. He wrote that in the "quite likely" event that the case returns to SCOTUS, "Yeshiva would likely win." The other five Justices didn't join in, likely because they focused on the lack of procedural grounds for YU to have a case. But why did Alito think Yeshiva would win?

At the state level, the main question was if YU falls under the NYCHRL. YU argued that it does not, since it sees itself as a fundamentally religious institution that pursues fundamentally religious goals, and thinks it should therefore fall under the NYCHRL's exceptions. The Pride Alliance argued, and the judge agreed, that under the definitions provided in the NYCHRL itself, YU does not qualify for the religious exemption. YU is chartered as a New York State educational institution; therefore, the judge ruled that it falls under the NYCHRL.

In contrast, in its SCOTUS brief, YU emphasized a different aspect of the case. Here, a First Amendment argument about religious liberty, the content of which will be spelled out here, was front and center. In their SCOTUS brief, the Pride Alliance focused on procedural arguments, arguing that YU should have gone to other state courts before SCOTUS, which SCOTUS agreed with. The majority in the Court declined to rule on the actual questions of the case. However, since those substantive First Amendment issues will likely come before the Court again, it is worth understanding them.

YU formulated its three points of attack very clearly in its SCOTUS filing. I present here a summary from their filing, which I will proceed to unpack in plain language:

1. Whether, under the First Amendment's Religion Clauses, the New York City Human Rights Law can be applied to override Yeshiva University's religious judgment about which student organizations to officially recognize on campus consistent with its Torah values.

2. Whether, under *Employment Division v. Smith*, the New York City Human Rights Law, which categorically exempts hundreds of organizations from its reach and allows individualized exceptions for "bona fide reasons of public policy," is "neutral" and "generally applicable."

3. Whether *Employment Division v. Smith* should be overruled.

The first of these points asked SCOTUS to say that lower courts were wrong about YU being mandated to follow NYCHRL regulations. The arguments on both sides of this point have already been laid out.

The second and third points both relate to a case called *Employment Division v. Smith* (1990). The decision in that case, written by the late Justice Antonin Scalia, remains the basic framework for applying the First

Continued on Page 10



Students protest in front of YU.

YU PRIDE ALLIANCE

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

(October 27, 1958; Volume 48, Issue 2) — Opposition in "Heights" to Pilgrim's Progress

By Charles Porsky

Editor's Note: Nearly sixty five years ago, on Oct. 4, 1958, Thomas Fitzpatrick stole a plane and landed it in front of a Yeshiva University building. The following humorous article, which gets many details about the incident wrong, was The Commentator's reporting on the event at the time.

A new page in the history of commuting was written this past Succot, when a New Jersey resident, sick and tired of traffic jams, crowded buses, and still more crowded trains, took matters into his own hands and made the trip across the Hudson by plane.

As is the case with all idealistic and futuristic thinkers, the opposition to the plan ran fast and furious. A man of principles, however, cannot be stopped by the opposition from an antiquarian society. The great thinker stole a plane from Teterboro Airport (the headquarters of the opposition), and made the historic flight anyways, landing at 187th St. and Amsterdam Ave. at 12:45 A.M.

High Flyer Downed

The Anti-Progress Committee of Washington Heights was not yet beaten, however, and they had this brilliant man arrested and charged with such trivial things as grand larceny, (it wasn't even a new plane and the seats were dirty), and violation of the Civil Aeronautics Board regulations (what does a license mean when progress is at stake?).

The Commentator immediately sent out a reporter to interview this man of the future, while still at the scene of the great event. Our reporter asked the pilot, George "Flying Tiger" Wino, what he thought of his being arrested. G. "F. T." W. answered "Urrrp!" Words of wisdom, my friends, the words of a prophet.

We at Yeshiva University should take pride in the fact that such a man as George "Flying Tiger" Wino should have chosen to land so near to our school. Bite your tongues, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, for you see, it takes genius to recognize a real University.



PAGE THREE

God Is My Co-Pilot:

Opposition in "Heights" To Pilgrim's Progress

by Charles Porsky

A new page in the history of commuting was written this past *Succot*, when a New Jersey resident, sick and tired of traffic jams, crowded buses, and still more crowded trains, took matters into his own hands and made the trip across the Hudson by plane.

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Daner,Book,Joseph

PRIDE ALLIANCE
Continued from Page 9

Amendment's religious liberty clause. It deals with defining the limits of religious liberty. For example, if my sincerely held religious belief is that I have to drive my car down the wrong side of the road, no one would doubt that the government can still bar me from doing so. There is, in other words, some limit. This case established that limit as any laws that are *neutral*, that is, not designed to target religion, and *generally applicable*, that is, which apply to everyone without major exceptions for other reasons, are usually allowed to incidentally burden someone's religious beliefs. In simpler terms, a law that was not designed to target religion (is neutral), and that applies to everyone without major exceptions for other reasons (generally applicable) would be legal, even if it ran afoul of someone's religious beliefs.

YU's second and third arguments rely on establishing itself as an institution that, if not explicitly religious in its charter, is a fundamentally religious one, guided by religious values. To this end, nearly half of YU's SCOTUS brief focuses on establishing its religious identity, with references to the amount of religious education in YU, quotes from the plaintiffs to the effect that they and other students chose to attend YU to "further religious growth," an emphasis on the religious nature the Pride Alliance intends to play and pictures of religious activities taking place in YU.

These arguments leave aside the NYCHRL's definition of religious institutions, instead seeking to prove that YU is an institution sufficiently driven and motivated by religion to merit First Amendment protections.

With this background, YU's second argument can be explained clearly. YU claims that the NYCHRL is not, in fact, applicable under *Smith*, due to the many exceptions for various groups it contains. Religious corporations or even, YU argues, legally secular corporations with religious values fundamental to their identity, must be exempt from the NYCHRL. The Pride Alliance will likely point to the contradiction of allowing corporations to claim to be non-sectarian and also receive religious exemptions, according to legal experts I consulted. The SCOTUS ruling could go either way given recent precedents such as Masterpiece Cakeshop (2017) and Fulton (2020).

YU's last argument is that *Smith* should be overturned entirely. This is an argument that several recent legal articles have made. In addition, three SCOTUS Justices have explicitly called for this action, while two others have said they're unsure about whether to overturn *Smith* and what standard should replace it. This implies that YU has a legitimate chance of succeeding in this argument.

The Pride Alliance didn't mention the merits on which it opposes overturning *Smith* in its SCOTUS filing, instead focusing on the procedural irregularity of overturning a previous ruling in an emergency appeal. However, it is likely, according to various legal experts I've consulted, that the counter-arguments that the Pride Alliance will rely on to try to preserve *Smith* are reliance on precedent and the arguments made by Justice Scalia in the *Smith* decision. Basically, these are that the historical standard by which laws conflicting with religious values have always been decided fits *Smith*, rather than some other standard. Furthermore, Scalia said that more exceptions would cause social consequences and harm the public, which the Pride Alliance certainly is arguing is occurring here.

There are other legal avenues that may end up being explored, but the above are the most likely ones. Justice Alito and the three justices who joined him in dissenting to the decision denying YU the stay seem to think that one of these points is likely to create a ruling in YU's favor. However, the fact that the other five justices did not sign on to that point or write a concurrence agreeing with it creates some room for doubt.

This issue is an extremely complex one, but when we in YU discuss and analyze this case, a full and proper understanding of the actual facts and arguments present is certainly necessary.

This article was published online with linked sources available. For clarification of the issues discussed or other aspects of the case, please reach out to the author at marmon@mail.yu.edu.

Ask Abby

The Commentator is proud to launch "Ask Abby", a brand new paper-only column. Every issue, Abby will offer advice to one or two reader-submitted questions. Readers are encouraged to submit questions to Abby they'd like advice for to askabby@yucommentator.org by Sept. 2.

The Commentator reserves the right to edit all user submissions. Advice here is not indicative of The Commentator's opinions and The Commentator does not take responsibility for the soundness of all advice offered in these pages.

Q: Dear Abby,

I cheated using AI on my first assignment, and I got caught. Now I am being sent to the academic standards committee and I'm terrified. My parents are really disappointed in me and I'm not sure what to do. The worst part is that I wasn't the only one who cheated. I know for a fact that two other people cheated using AI in this specific class but the professor only reported me! This isn't fair. What advice can you give me?

Sincerely,
Vulnerable Victim

A: Dear Vulnerable,

It must be so hard to be held accountable for your own actions. I totally understand your frustration (please note the sarcasm). I think the best thing to do in this situation is to report the other two people so that you're not the only one in trouble! That way, you will have people who can relate to you and you can tell your parents that at least you weren't the only one to cheat. That is bound to make them less upset.

Additionally, another small piece of advice. Don't cheat.

Sincerely,
Abby

Abby was an original student of Stern College for Women back in 1954. Though she never graduated and remains a super super senior, she can draw on her years of experience at Yeshiva University to give superior advice to those in need.

You can contact Abby at ask.abby@yucommentator.org. The deadline to get questions in for the next issue is Sept. 2.

From The YSU President's Desk

Welcome to YU, It's Not a Simple Place

By Zachary Notkin

The premise of this article is simple. As one of the Student Council presidents, I am writing to welcome new and returning students to the Yeshiva University 2023–2024 academic year. For me, this is bittersweet, as it marks my (hopefully) final year on this campus, after so many in both MTA and Yeshiva College (YC).

I suppose I should also give you advice, although I hardly feel qualified to give it. YU is a large and unique place. After all these years, I am only beginning to understand how much I don't know. Despite my previous familiarity with the campus and its inhabitants, I found starting undergrad to be difficult. Between religion, academics, healthy habits and a decent social life, I felt pushed and pulled to my breaking point. I know that many returning students agree, and new students, you have been warned.

But I also met some of the most warmhearted, accepting, and kind people here, and I will cherish those relationships forever. Sure, it started rough, as the Gemara states "*Kol hatkhalot kashot* — all beginnings are difficult," but, with time and support from my friends, I got through it. I would like to make it clear to first-time students that it gets better, and that I have witnessed and experienced the dire problems caused by the stigma around mental health issues. Everyone, I repeat everyone, needs help sometimes.

To return to a lighter note, the push-and-pull that is universal to the YU experience reminds me of a question once famously posed in a letter to Rav Hutner *z"tl*. The questioner asked how the tug of war we experience in our lives between the holy and the profane, the religious and the secular, the *beit midrash* and the classroom, does not constitute a contradictory double life. Rav Hutner answered that only a person with two homes lives a double life. But if he has a house with a dining room and a living room, he lives not a double life, but a broad life. Walt Whitman, in reference to his own apparent contradictions, said "I am large, I contain multitudes."

My advice, to both the FTOCs and returning students, the right-wingers and the left-wingers, those who love YU and those who hate it, is the same. Put yourself out there and take whatever opportunities strike your fancy.

As your years pass here at YU, countless, varied opportunities and decisions will present themselves. The opportunities to get involved include the multiple student councils, each working to improve the student experience in their own way and with their own focus. There are countless clubs and organizations that each provide a distinct and meaningful addition to the lives of those who choose to participate in them, as well as a broad spectrum of academic and religious offerings. I implore you to explore these options and, over time, find out what works for you. Do not limit or constrain yourself or others on the basis of what crowd you grew up in. Even worse would be to judge or dismiss others on the basis of their external characteristics, such as what color shirt they wear, something I have experienced far too often here. Jonathan Schwab, a man I am proud to work alongside at the Office of Student Life, actually did a PhD dissertation on this topic, and he found that religious male students almost universally feel isolated out of fear of being judged by their peers.

My advice, to both first time and returning students, the right-wingers and the left-wingers, those who love YU and those who hate it, is the same. Put yourself out there and take whatever opportunities strike your fancy. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there, don't feel constrained by your preconceived notions and don't be afraid to fail on your first try. Don't let peer pressure turn you into something you're not, and find role models where you don't expect them. It's hard and it takes time, but you'll get there. And, even if you can't do that, don't judge other people for it.

I hope to hold some sort of town hall or office hours over the first week of classes so that I, as the President of the Yeshiva Student Union, can help facilitate those opportunities. I look forward to meeting all of you, and just in case I don't, I welcome you here as well. As president of YSU, I hope to create a welcoming environment here for all students, no matter their race, religious observance, sexual orientation, or gender identity.



The author directing a student at 2022 orientation YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

A Renewed Call to Appreciate YU's *Torah U'Madda*

By Hannah Mamet

Having attended a Modern-Orthodox high school, I certainly heard of *Torah U'Madda* before coming to campus. I learned of its definition and knew it was associated with Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Also, having two older siblings who attended YU, I was very familiar with the classic, magnetic blue and white logo that is attached all over our refrigerator. However, looking back at my first year of college, it was not until I stepped onto the Stern campus did I really experience what this truly meant.

The term *Torah U'Madda*, which prominently occupies the center of YU's logo, was originally popularized by the late Rabbi Norman Lamm, one of YU's past presidents. It is generally interpreted as valuing Torah studies while also emphasizing the acquisition of secular knowledge.

As someone interested in studying biology, I naturally began my first semester of college taking Biology Principles and General Chemistry. It was here that I suddenly found myself enveloped in a world of science, yet one that was infused with religious meaning. While in high school, the two disciplines were kept separate — general and Judaic subjects had defined periods — I was shocked to find that many of my Stern professors actively incorporated Torah into their lectures. During one of my first Chemistry lectures when we learned about the periodic table in depth, Dr. Rapp explained how it was not "organized by Mendeleev until the 1860's but many elements were known before. For example, six are mentioned in the Torah in *Bamidbar* 31:22, in the context of metals taken from the spoils of war that need to be purified."

From taking such classes at Stern, I not only learned a tremendous amount of science, but also a surprising amount of Torah.

When discussing the chemical reaction involved in cavity formation, specifically how acid causes tooth decay, Dr. Rapp quoted a verse from *Mishlei*: "As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy person to those that send him" (10:26).

It was not just in my Chemistry class that I experienced *Torah UMaada*, though. To Dr. Loewy, my Biology Principles professor, everything about the human body deserves reverence since it is an incredible creation of G-d. During one Biology lecture, we learned about the sodium-potassium pump, an electrogenic enzyme found in the membrane of animal cells. Dr. Loewy emphasized the brilliant way it regulates what enters and exits the cell through its ability to alternate between two conformations and changing its affinities towards sodium or potassium. While to an ordinary student in any institution these wise feats of human physiology might merely be nodded at as "interesting" or "cool", to many of my professors, being religious individuals, these wonders of the human body should be viewed and appreciated by their students as divine creations.

From taking such classes at Stern, I not only learned a tremendous amount of science, but also a surprising amount of Torah. Now, anytime I study science, I am actively amazed by the incredible way in which the human body works.

From these classes I learned many things. I was taught, either verbally or indirectly, to appreciate science from the perspective of a Torah-observant Jew and to appreciate Torah from the perspective of a person who has amassed secular knowledge as well. I gained a new appreciation for the way in which the body functions. Indeed, the prayer *asher yatzar* beckons us to have the knowledge that "G-d fashioned man with wisdom" and were a bodily function to be ruptured "it would be impossible to survive and stand before" Him. From this perspective of awe, comes another level of respect for others since Jewish tradition also teaches that "G-d created Man in His image" (*Bereshit* 1:27).

I am proud to be a part of an institution that values adherence to Torah as well as the pursuit of worldly-knowledge and grateful to my professors, who inspire the next generation of religious Jews. I am excited to take this commitment to Torah values and secular knowledge beyond the Stern campus.

YU Torah UMaada Emblem YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Od Lo Avdah Tikvatenu: A New Solution to the Humanities Crisis

By Joshua Shapiro

"What are you gonna do with a Jewish studies major?"

When I tell people that I am majoring in Jewish studies, they retort with a wide array of comments. Whether it is asking if I aspire to be "professionally unemployed" or if I plan on condemning myself to the rabbinate (maybe, but that's a different conversation), people have said it all. Sometimes, I add that I used to be an English major, which leaves them looking even more confused.

While years ago, majoring in the humanities was very prevalent, if not mainstream among college students, this has drastically changed. Whether they are more compelled to study vocational fields, dissuaded by the shift to the left in academia, bored by the prose of Shakespeare or left dissatisfied by the areas of focus in a humanities education, university students around the country are instead majoring in disciplines like business, computer science, and biology.

Even Yeshiva University, the champion of *Torah UMadda* and learning texts for their own sake, is not immune to this widespread decline. In 2017, the enrollment in Yeshiva University's Sy Syms School of Business surpassed that of Yeshiva College, where the humanities are studied. This shift has not developed quietly. A cursory examination of The Commentator's website often presents dissenters expressing their dissatisfaction with the university — whether it be the essential closure of the Hebrew department, reduction of humanities requirements for Sy Syms or selection of courses offered by the English department.

Yet is this also the case in American Jewish high schools? Since students do not have as much autonomy in class choice and primarily must follow required courses, it is difficult to gauge the exact interest level in studying the humanities. Still, perhaps the proliferation of STEM classes in high schools reveals at the very least a shift in emphasis.

However, there remains one bright spot for the humanities in Jewish circles: the Tikvah Fund. This past summer, I had the privilege of working as a resident advisor and teacher's assistant on the Jewish educational think tank's "Tikvah Scholars Program," based at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. Spanning ten days in August, the program hosted nearly seventy Jewish students from around the country — ranging from typical New York Modern Orthodox *yeshivas* to public schools with only a handful of Jews — and we all studied important essays, classical texts and Jewish philosophy. And this was during their summer vacation!

The program was powerful for several reasons. Most prominently, it demonstrated that many Jewish high school students, irrespective of background, are still interested in discussing ideas — whether it be in philosophy, economics or literature. In the "Jewish Ideas" class I was in, taught by the senior director of Tikvah, Rabbi Mark Gottlieb, students with little experience in traditional Jewish texts carefully examined chapters in the Torah and demonstrated how what they perhaps previously viewed as childhood stories — like the creation of the world, Tower of Babel and Abraham's journey — actually construct sophisticated ideologies. We also read and conversed about essays by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel and debated topics like the source of morality, religious self-transcendence and the importance of ritual.

The students studied broader topics as well. Other classes focused on Zionist history, the writings of George Orwell, economic theory and the trajectory of conservatism.

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the program, though, was how so many students strengthened their connection to Judaism. After five hours of seminar a day, nearly ten students attended a Talmud shiur that I gave on the topic of *mitzvot asei she'hazeman gerama* (positive-time bound commandments). While some of these students were already passionate learners in Modern Orthodox high schools, some had little to no background in Talmud or even Hebrew. One fellow was the only Jew in his North Carolina public school, and two girls from Paris, who are not offered Talmud classes in their school, were interested in learning it for the first time.

Given the current state of the humanities in institutions around the country, Tikvah's model of education is perhaps the future for interested students in institutions that focus in different areas.

While there was a variety of religious denominations and prayer options amongst the students, there were a few moments of ritual unity. Whatever one's Shabbat observance was at home, everyone publicly kept Shabbat on the program. We all *davened* a musical *kabbalat Shabbat* together in the Orthodox minyan, sang *zemirot* and heard *divrei Torah* throughout meals, played Settlers of Catan and closed out Shabbat with a beautiful *havdalah* and the customary "*Sha-Sha-Shavua Tov*." Some students even fully observed Shabbat for the first time and expressed interest in continuing in the future.

Students strengthened their Jewish identities in other ways as well. One participant from southern California mentioned that he will begin to wear a Kippah to school everyday, and another from Massachusetts expressed strong interest in taking a gap year in Israel.

It is worth mentioning that while the program was primarily run by Orthodox people and rabbis, there was never any push towards Orthodoxy or attempts at *kiruv*. In fact, Tikvah's approach, while certainly acknowledging the significance of Jewish ritual, focuses its efforts on Jewish ideas and the effect they can have on our lives.

Tikvah's influence, though, transcends the high school level. They have numerous programs and fellowships for middle schoolers, gap year participants, college students, postgraduates, and adults as well, some of which I have been fortunate enough to partake in. These seminars range from one-off lectures, several-part series and semester-long courses, and all can be taken in concomitance to the existing work one has. Some of the seminars I have taken on C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton and different educational responses to the Holocaust have been the most enlightening classes I have ever taken, and specifically because these classes were purely volitional and not part of any school curriculum, I discovered my passion for reading works of the humanities.

Given the current state of the humanities in institutions around the country, Tikvah's model of education is perhaps the future for interested students in institutions that focus in different areas. As schools move away from core classes in subjects like English and history, it is incumbent upon the students to independently pursue the topics that pique their interests. If your school no longer offers classes on the political philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, go and take classes with the Catherine Project. If you desire to study Jewish philosophy but are too swamped with your computer science classes, get involved with Tikvah and see what they have to offer. As one rabbi once remarked to me in the name of Rav Lichtenstein *zt"l*, even if our institutions do not offer the *Torah UMadda* as we envision, this does not absolve us of our responsibility to become complex religious thinkers with a well-rounded education.

In my own life, I have taken those words pretty seriously, especially since I arrived at Yeshiva University. While I am grateful to the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought for supplying numerous enriching courses, I was left unsatiated. Already last year, with the help of some friends, we started a Tikvah Chapter at YU, where nearly every other week, ten to fifteen of us ate dinner together and discussed different philosophy readings. This semester alone, our chapter looks forward to participating in at least six sessions led by Rabbi Yitzchak Blau on the essays of Cynthia Ozick and Rabbi Gottlieb on the thought of Michael Wyschogrod.

While it is sometimes easier to cheaply express cynicism and polemicize with naysayers about the state of the humanities, this often distracts us from taking initiative and actually engaging with the valuable content we are supposedly passionate about. Opportunities outside of our typical academic requirements like Tikvah, though, allow us to remove ourselves from these perennial debates and return to learning for its own sake. The only question is whether you will come join us this semester.



A decline in the study of the humanities at institutions is forcing many students to discover new educational forums.

UNSPLASH

What Does the Pride Alliance Actually Do?

By Dov Pfeiffer

The Yeshiva University Pride Alliance, sometimes shortened to YUPA, has existed since 2019, and has been a frequent topic of campus conversation since. I joined the board in the beginning of last fall semester, a time when the organization was frequently mentioned in the news and discussed on campus. Despite the constant dialogue, I often observed a lack of knowledge concerning a crucial question. What does the Pride Alliance actually do?

"My goal with YUPA is that no student ever has to feel alone and that students can have a sense of community and a sense of belonging within their institution and within their religion."

Avery Allen (SCW '24), president of YUPA

Avery Allen (SCW '24), one of the presidents of the Pride Alliance, summarized why the organization is important to her and her general goals. "When I first came to YU I didn't know that there were any resources for people like me, and it often felt really alienating," Allen said. "My goal with YUPA is that no student ever has to feel alone, and that students can have a sense of community and a sense of belonging within their institution and within their religion." A similar statement can be found on our website. My aim here is to provide a fuller snapshot of what the Pride Alliance currently does that goes beyond what brief statements can provide.

The Pride Alliance's primary practical concern is organizing events that provide a safe space for the queer community. There are queer students who attend YU for many of the same reasons any other student does. Unfortunately, though, as was testified in several affidavits and as is still the case now, YU is often not a comfortable place to be queer. We seek to alleviate that discomfort by arranging events which provide a safe space where students can simply enjoy themselves with friends without feeling like their very existence is negotiable. Activities we've held in the past include Build-A-Bear, a paint night and a board game event. Our events are intended not just for queer students but also for allies, open to all who seek to participate in or experience a welcoming space for the YU queer community.

Two members of the board, Yaffa Goldkin (SCW '24) and Manny Ehrlich (YC '24), serve as admins on a private chat for undergraduate queer students, a separate entity from the Pride Alliance, that helps provide community. Ehrlich described the chat's purpose "as a way to make new friends that also provides a space for students to feel safe when they need advice, support or simply to vent."

The Pride Alliance also seeks to amplify queer voices within the university. The YUPA Writing Committee, which I currently head, published two articles in The Observer last year, and aims to facilitate more this year. Our new website also enables more communication through an "Ask the Alliance" section and features an ongoing project to collate the recent history of LGBTQ student experiences in YU.

Because the Pride Alliance is not an approved YU club, we struggle to reach students and are unable to host events on campus. Approved clubs have the ability to reach out to students through email lists. The Pride Alliance, by contrast, does not, which can make it difficult for queer students to find out about the chat or events. Similarly, while approved clubs can rent rooms within YU, enabling easy event access, the Pride Alliance's events are held off campus and require travel to attend.

Our purpose is not to try to bully others into believing a particular platform. We seek neither to force anyone to agree with our goals nor to condemn students who disagree. There is no goal of changing *halakha*. Involved students come from a plethora of backgrounds and have differing views on many issues. Instead, our primary purposes and pursuits are practical and internal to the community, to support each other.

Many who join the board do so because of positive experiences they had through the club. A fellow board member shared, "As a queer student, when I came to YU, I felt so alone. I am forever grateful to the YUPA community for the incredible friendships and camaraderie I have been able to experience."

What we do is fairly simple. We try to make YU a place where queer students feel comfortable as they maximize their university experience. We seek to foster an inclusive community where queer students feel comfortable being themselves. In the future, we hope YU will support us in carrying out this mission; in the interim, we are working to accomplish these goals ourselves.

Queer YU undergraduate students interested in joining the private chat can reach out by contacting Manny Ehrlich or Yaffa Goldkin, or by sending an email to Groupchatapplication613@gmail.com



Food from a Pride Alliance event YU PRIDE ALLIANCE

Let's Stop Keeping Track

By Rebecca Guzman

"Thirty eight of 70 books completed. Two books behind schedule!" announces the little banner on my Goodreads profile. It's only July, so being two books behind schedule isn't too disastrous for my yearly reading goal, but the little banner seems to be mocking me. The exclamation point especially. I'm reading as fast as I can, I think pitifully, but then I stop myself. I'm reading as fast as I can? There I was, sitting with a closed book in my hands — the novel now merely another pixelated square in the grid reflecting my reading "progress" — despondently scrolling through an app that attempted no mercy in telling me how bad I was at reading. I wasn't even thinking about the book, which had been phenomenal and mind-bending. I was thinking about the app, because it had transformed reading into a task at which I either succeeded or failed, and literature was the metric. And because I realized that I am the type of person who would much rather think about a book than an app, I deleted it. Farewell, Goodreads.

After that, I noticed that I was approaching literature differently. I wasn't thinking about a reading goal; there was no number flashing in the back of my mind as I waded through novel after novel. I stopped rushing. I stopped focusing on the result — which, in the case of Goodreads, was impressing some random internet strangers and adding yet another book to an ever-growing list of completed reads — and I started focusing on the experience itself. I now had the luxury of reading and rereading the sentences and passages that amazed me. It was like I was a little girl again, sitting in the New York Public Library after school and begging my mother to please wait five more minutes so I could get to the end of the chapter. But I didn't feel that way because I was rushed.

When we yield to a cultural landscape that values the mere intake of artistic experiences over the adventure of them, we surrender the power of our human capacity to appreciate and learn from art.

On the contrary, I felt that way because I had allowed myself to slow down, and in slowing down, I was able to restore the wondrous experience of reading that I had lost.

This fast-paced, consumption-focused behavior is not exclusive to apps and sites like Goodreads, but is indicative of society's relentless obsession with amassing goods and experiences. Literature is just one of the casualties of a culture where the completion of a task is considered more important than performance of the task itself. We engage in this toxic process constantly and often without realizing it. For example, you attend the concert of a band you love — they hold a place in both your heart and your Spotify Wrapped — but you spend most of the concert angling for the best shot of the lead guitarist, or trying to hold your phone above the heads of fellow concertgoers to capture the perfect video to later post online. Suddenly, the lights come back on, and you feel as though you were never there at all.

When we yield to a cultural landscape that values the mere intake of artistic experiences over the adventure of them, we surrender the power of our human capacity to appreciate and learn from art. We lose the very thing we should be gaining and we forfeit the very purpose of the experience. Our perception of time and commitment suffers. When we submit to a value system that tells us to constantly look forward to the next shiny thing and to seek validation from the end result as opposed to the process, we rush through the present moment with our minds elsewhere. When I watch videos of the concerts I went to the summer after graduating high school, I can hear myself and my friends singing along to the music but I can't remember the feeling of hearing it – that rush as the lights dimmed and the first guitar strum sounded, how much of it did I lose as I scrambled to record it? Those stacks of novels in my bedroom, did I concede some of their magic when I so egregiously dedicated myself to reaching their final pages?

In a world that asks us to speed through everything, to look at the finish line and to neglect the awe of the race, it is difficult to engage in the very processes that require slowness and attentiveness. Reading, for

Continued on Page 13



The works of art that expand our minds and the moments that shape us can only impact our lives if we slow down and let them. HERMANN VIA PIXABAY

History Has its Eyes on YU

By Eli Saperstein

This article was originally published June 1, 2023.

"If you stand for nothing, what will you fall for?" Throughout my time in YU, I feel this question has not been definitively answered. As I leave these hallowed halls, I hope to share one last time as a student my thoughts on what YU does stand for with the student body.

I want to talk about opportunity. I want to warn about division. I want to talk about what I've learned here and the hard-won wisdom I have earned. To say one last time as a student, what I feel YU stands for. To say one last time no matter who you are, Yeshiva University is a place that is wide enough to accept you for who you are and enable you to become the you, you want to be.

Graduation doesn't discriminate. It takes, and it takes, and it takes our best leaders from the student body. Too many initiatives and ideas fail based not on their merits but because students don't have enough time to complete them, leaving the graduates wishing if only we had more time to create a better tomorrow for our peers. History has its eyes on YU, but more importantly, history has its eyes on you, the students of YU, the next generation that will continue the many dreams of YU graduates long past. Dreams—some of which I have been blessed to have achieved and seen reach fruition, and so many more I will never get to see as a student.

I've imagined graduation so much that it feels like a memory. I often have wondered what my legacy as a student will be. What mark have I left on this institution, what is my legacy? Are my services complete, or have I only engraved the beginning notes into the beautiful, never-finished, ever-growing symphony that is YU?

To my fellow graduates, may you always be satisfied with your time at YU. Remember your days and long nights at YU. Never forget the many things you haven't yet done. But just you wait. The feeling of freedom, of seeing the light. It feels like a dream to finally graduate. I know I said we should be satisfied, but I am not. Despite working non-stop and accomplishing all that I have, I am not yet satisfied. I may never be satisfied. Yet, despite this, I am proud.

Pride isn't the word I'm looking for, or is it? See, I never thought I'd make it to YU. Where I come from, YU gets barely any. I didn't even know YU existed until my senior year of high school. Yet without YU, I would never have become the person I am today. Rising up to the occasion, to take advantage of all the opportunities I saw that turned my life upside down, has been a privilege and an honor. They have shaped not just my experience at YU, but who I am today and who I will forever continue to be. They taught me something I wish I'd known when I was younger and dreaming of my time here — that every action at YU is an act of creation, but for the first time I'm thinking past graduation.

History has its eyes on YU, but more importantly, history has its eyes on you, the students of YU, the next generation that will continue the many dreams of YU graduates long past.

At Yeshiva University, it is clear to students that we are part of a legacy, a garden planted by people who will never get to see the full fruits of their labor. This is the YU legacy. Seniors bleeding and fighting for YU, to make YU right for you, the future students of YU and the whole broader YU community. We hope that if we lay a strong enough foundation we will pass it on to you and that someday you'll blow us all away. I believe this is the reason our university grows great – because seniors plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit. Yet now, we the graduates must sit under our own tree, and hope that nothing will make us afraid, here in this YU we have made — one last time.

Looking around as a soon-to-be graduate, I feel so lucky to be alive right now. It feels as if YU sent for me. YU let me make a difference, creating a place where anyone can leave their fingerprints behind, even someone from Monsey who never knew about *Torah UMadda* or the world it represented. As someone who grew up outside of the YU community, nowhere is there more potential than Yeshiva University. It combines the best of *yeshivos* and the best of universities.

As I prepare to bid farewell, I would like to express my thoughts on issues that Yeshiva University must address to become the institution future generations of students deserve.

One of my primary concerns for the future of YU is the lack of students who are actively involving themselves in the YU community and seeking leadership roles. The student body needs to rise up to the occasion and take control of their own fate. We, the graduates, are asking you to lead, to do the best you can, to leave behind the world you know and be the people that we need. I do acknowledge that we cannot write our way out of this, but I hope that for those reading this in the future that they will not just pick up a pen and start writing but realize their true potential and be their own deliverance. YU helps those who help themselves.

YU's involvement in our local Washington Heights community is significantly lacking on an individual level. We need to learn their stories, to be moved to kindness and involve ourselves in our communities, local and Jewish alike. This needs to be our YU legacy. Currently, it feels as though the only link between YU and the community in the Heights is Lin Manuel Miranda. That needs to be improved.

At YU, students don't fear external antisemitism but have in its absence created internal "enemies." We must address issues arising from small differences. We must work together and harder to stomp out the stigmas and harmful stereotypes within YU. We must provide more resources for promoting understanding and tolerance and actively dismantle stereotypes and misunderstandings among our diverse YU community.

We need more Jewish pride at YU. We need more swag. As religious Jews at YU, we take for granted how convenient it is to practice our faith. To create pride in our religious identity absent of adversity, we must celebrate our Yeshiva University and have a better understanding of what YU does stand for and our place within that. The "Five Core Torah Values" haven't been embraced by the students. However, they could be a basis for a potential solution. Increasing school spirit and celebrating our unity and differences (through swag and clubs) can help address the divisions and infighting in our community. The bubble that YU creates serves a purpose, but it is time to acknowledge the rifts it is creating within it and the larger Jewish community.

In reviewing the incidents in my YU career, I'm aware of no intentional error. However, I am too sensible to think I have not committed many. To the students reading this, let me tell you what I wished I'd known when I was young and starting YU. Go to the career center and work hard on your (LinkedIn) resume — it is the only piece of paper that matters more than your diploma. Do not wait until when you need it, for by then it is too late. Speak with your academic advisors, and plan out your classes well in advance. Avoid any assumptions and get everything in writing. Speak to your professors inside and outside the classroom. Introduce yourselves to professors you do not take and to administrators and faculty you do not yet know.

At YU we think about *l'dor va'dor*, but we don't go door to door to meet the world-class individuals of our generation. Knock on any door you can in these hallowed halls. You may be surprised by who opens it and invites you in. This will permanently open many doors for you that were previously closed, giving you the opportunity to be in the room where it happens and make a difference. Network nonstop, build the relationships you want tomorrow, today. If you have a dream, rise up, make a club and make it happen. Heed not the rabble who scream it won't work: They have not your interest at heart. I implore you to empower yourself to take control of your own narrative. Don't wait for it. Do not throw away your shot.

As a student, you get to see glimpses of the other side when alumni come back to campus for panels and other activities. To them, I ask, teach me how to say goodbye, and to my friends and mentors I've made here at YU, I hope to never say goodbye. I'll see you on the other side.

I have had the honor to be your obedient student,

E. Sap



As someone who grew up outside of the YU community, nowhere is there more potential than Yeshiva University. JOE SHLABOTNIK VIA FLICKR

KEEPING TRACK
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example, becomes inauthentic when the ending of a book matters more than the thrill of the story. Nights out with friends become about the Instagram post instead of the connection. What else can we lose as we rush onward? Why should we lose even more? The works of art that expand our minds and the moments that shape us can only come about and impact our lives if we slow down and let them. In her 1990 poem, "The Summer Day," Mary Oliver writes, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?" The question is daunting, yes, but it can also be liberating when we decide to stop keeping track and just be. That's when something beautiful can happen, and that's when we can notice that beauty.

How YU Won the TAMID National Competition

By Liorah Yaghoubzar

Although risky, rooting for the underdog sometimes turns out to be the wise choice. Every semester, one of the business clubs on campus brings together the best and brightest students in YU to compete in a case competition against over 60 universities. The largest and top universities across the globe compete in this national competition; some of the universities are even 10 times the size of Yeshiva University. However this past spring, for only the second time in history, Yeshiva University came in first place in the TAMID national case competition.

TAMID is a non-profit organization that, according to their website, "connects business-minded students from universities across the world to the Israeli economy." TAMID offers four different tracks that allow students to explore various areas of the business world, including education, consulting, investment and technology. When joining TAMID all new members participate in the education track where they are exposed to basic business principles and the Israeli startup ecosystem. Each education semester culminates with the international case competition, where teams compete to solve a challenging business problem facing an Israeli company.

During my first semester as a member of TAMID's education chapter, I participated along with my team in an effort to address specific business challenges faced by SodaStream, an Israeli company. In TAMID competitions, for the first round, students are randomly grouped into teams consisting of 3–5 people who also attend their university and compete against fellow students within their school. In the second round, the winning team from each participating university then advances to compete against all the winning teams from each of the other schools. I remember initially feeling confident in our chances of winning the primary competition that was exclusively among the other YU teams, but winning the national case competition against top universities seemed almost impossible.

Yeshiva University, while not the largest institution, celebrated its second first-place in TAMID's national competition.

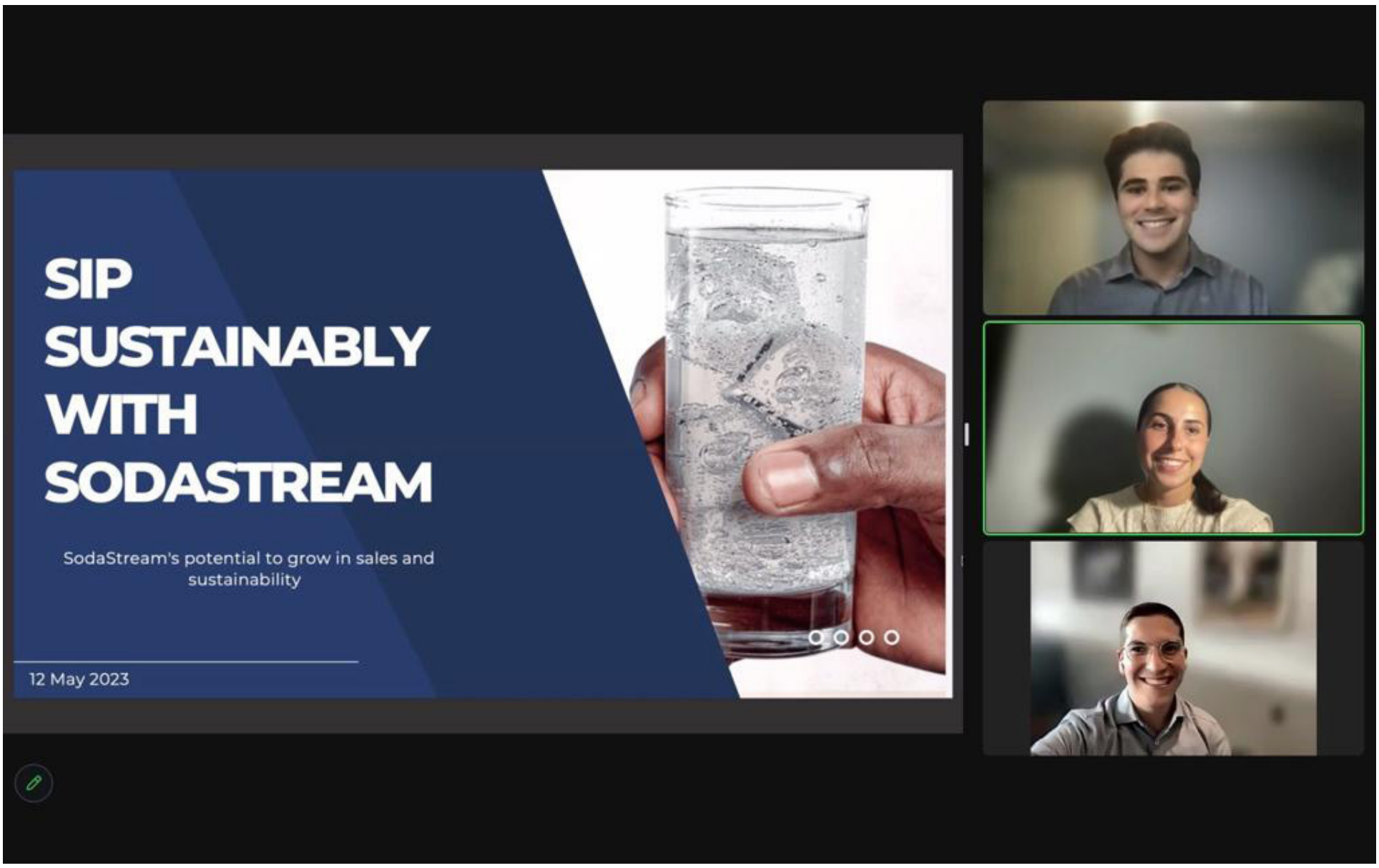
The 3-person team that included Ezra Wallach (SSSB '25), Jake Schochet (SSSB '24) and myself was just a group of strangers who were put together through names picked out of a hat. Our initial lack of familiarity with each other could very well have posed a challenge and hindered our success, but over time, as we invested countless hours into working together on solving the issue at hand, our individual strengths began to complement each other and our commitment to the team grew. I'll be the first to admit that initially, the project at hand did not excite us too much. However, after countless Facetime calls of brainstorming sessions, this issue became something we were not only passionate about but dedicated to solving. This passion and drive that quickly developed within our group was the driving force behind the success of our project as well as the support of our coach, Lieba Weiss (SCW '23), who often joined our calls and was constantly available over text, facilitating our growing passion towards the project.

SodaStream is a widely known carbonated beverage company based in Israel. During one of our many team meetings my teammate, Ezra Wallach, mentioned how he had heard about an Israeli company called Helios that was originally created as a space company, but had developed a novel method to produce metal. At first, we joked about how crazy of an idea it would be to have SodaStream partner with them. However, after doing more research we discovered that this could be a perfect way for SodaStream to produce their metal canisters in an environmentally friendly way and help them move towards an ESG strategy. With more research, we even discovered that the two companies were only a 30-minute drive from each other, making them an even more perfect fit.

After securing first place competing against the other YU teams, we were thrilled. Our countless late nights were finally paying off, but that was just the beginning. We then had to get ready to face the top universities from around the world, and we had just one day to finalize our presentation before submitting it to TAMID national. Despite being cautioned by many not to set our expectations too high and reminded that, despite our YU victory, we were about to compete against some of the most esteemed schools, we refused to be discouraged. We worked throughout the night refining our presentation and ensuring that it was perfect, because we knew that if we wanted a chance at beating top-tier universities, perfection was essential.

My teammates and I, despite having been strangers just a few weeks ago, quickly came together and formed a cohesive team. We took the time to recognize each other's distinct strengths and seamlessly integrated them into the final project. The following day marked the deadline for submitting our video presentation to TAMID national. We recorded and re-recorded our presentation many times, striving for nothing short of perfection. When we eventually achieved the level of excellence we were aiming for, we felt a sense of relief and hope. The countless hours and dedication we had invested in the project over the past few weeks was beginning to finally pay off.

A few weeks later, we received the exhilarating news of our first-place victory in the national competition. All our hard work had finally paid off. More importantly, this achievement conveyed a crucial message — never underestimate the underdog. Yeshiva University, while not the largest institution, celebrated its second first-place win in TAMID's national competition.



YU Winning Team Presentation LIORAH YAGHOUBZAR


Got something to share?
Email editor@yucommentator.org
NEVER. STOP.
COMMENTATING.